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Statement submitted by AVSI Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Human dignity, inclusive partnership and the unique contribution of women

AVSI Foundation (AVSI), in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 1996, has several decades of experience in planning and implementing long-term development programs and emergency responses in almost 30 countries (Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia). Today, AVSI is implementing 130 projects in urban development, health, agriculture and food security, water supply, energy and environment in collaboration with more than 150 diverse partners, and reaching more than 2.6 million direct beneficiaries.

The common thread in these cooperation activities is the educational dimension in view of the ultimate goal of promoting the awareness and the enhancement of everyone's human dignity and the common good, according to the Catholic Social Teaching.

AVSI, on behalf also of the 35 various national organizations associated to the AVSI network, would like to offer some remarks and prospective suggestions on the theme of the current Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) session drawn from its approach and field involvement in eradicating poverty in all its forms.

We will focus on the issue of human dignity, the necessity for inclusive partnerships and the unique contribution of women.

1. Human Dignity

Eradicating poverty in all its forms clearly presupposes that poverty cannot be simply defined as lack of money or lack of access to financial resources. For instance, a grave form of poverty is the denial of fundamental human rights, which are universal, indivisible and inalienable.

In other words, the person can never be defined by sociological categories such as poverty or other challenging conditions, rather the person should be defined by the yearning, rooted in each human being, for one's fulfilment and the realization of the common good. Development and sustainability are primarily related to the person's innate dignity and freedom.

The respect and promotion of the dignity of each human being is based on the recognition that everyone, wherever and whenever, is born with an innate desire for justice, beauty, happiness and good for oneself and others. This innate desire is what is common to each person on earth. The discovery and recognition of this desire is what moves each individual and unlocks their own potential to look for what can fulfil one's life.

At the origin of each project, AVSI's concern is the recognition, together with the people who would be engaged in or benefit from the project, of their real needs and to help and respond, not by providing a precast solution from the outside, but by working together and interacting with reality to design an intervention consistent with the local context and the available resources. AVSI feels that its contribution is reflected more in the quality of accompaniment of the people involved in an activity than in the technical or financial assistance.

Nowadays, the debate about the external contribution and support and the cost effectiveness of a project is animated. In concrete terms: is the external assistance only necessary to hand out goods or cash, relying entirely on the capacity and the free engagement of each "beneficiary" as the agent of change or is there a need to

accompany and support? We are convinced that the real challenge lies in the way we consider the human being: an individual with his/her ability and potential without any bonds or rather an individual, unique, whose growth and development depends, by nature, on the well-lived relationships with the other.

2. Multi-stakeholder Engagement

Sustainable development touches all aspects of life and at its best requires the joint effort and commitment of several actors, of different nature, in order to make the most of the specific resources and capacity of each single entity towards a shared goal. As particularly stressed since the Rio+20 Conference, multi-stakeholders engagement is key to guarantee continuity in development and economic growth. Multi-stakeholder partnerships involve civil society, grassroots organization, non-profit providers, private and public sectors and emerging new donors, both private and public. The goal is to maximize the creation of shared value between all stakeholders through the delivery of products and services that meet personal and social needs. Each actor involved has different roles and purposes that should be maintained and respected. A long-term perspective and time and energy dedication to align the diverse entities towards the objective is not an option.

We would like to mention two significant projects among our recent multi-stakeholder experience. In Uganda, the projects SKY and AS4Y have both the government of Uganda and of The Netherlands importantly involved, as well as an active participation from the private sector. The projects aim to promote the expansion of the agricultural sector, the backbone of Ugandan economy, through the modernization of infrastructures, the training of qualified operators, and boosting investment in agriculture. The projects provide qualified training for 6,000 youth and reach out to 16,000 farmers in various districts of Uganda. There are several and diverse stakeholders that include farmers, agricultural vocational training schools, private national and international agri-business, governments, CSOs, and of course the youth. For multi-stakeholder partnerships, it is necessary to find a win-win solution for all actors involved. The government, by putting into place policies that encourage and safeguard investment particularly for the private sector, fulfils its crucial role. All of this is in line in fostering the SDG 17 that encourages partnerships to bring together governments, civil society, the private sector, the international cooperation agencies and other actors and mobilize all available resources.

3. Promotion of Women Worth and Potential

Women all over the world should participate fully in the social, cultural and economic life in name of the same dignity of every human being and in order to foster a harmonious world. Women participation starts with the family and continues within the community and in the workplace. Like a musical symphony, women participation in addition to men allows for each person to both bring his/her own peculiarity and yield and enjoy the common richness and good.

Women have the right to live with dignity and freedom, without being intimidated by fear or harassment. Furthermore, equal opportunities are a precondition for development and poverty reduction. It is important to stress that women's empowerment is effective and respectful as women specific initiatives are proposed and substantiated as a step further toward the respect and the value of the woman who enjoys the innate dignity like man.

AVSI has been careful in keeping with this approach. Various projects in different countries show evidence that produces a lot of beneficial and unpredictable outcomes for the women themselves and for their community. From COCAKA (Cooperative for the Promotion of Coffee Kageyo), an AVSI supported project in

Rwanda, a young woman, Daphrosa, started a coffee beans production cooperative (7.5 hectares currently producing five tons of coffee per harvest) that now has 113 members, mainly women. Thanks to this cooperative, a nursery school, including training for childcare, a center for adult literacy, and a club called Urubohero, where women can meet and share their experience, facing problems and finding solutions, was created. Similarly in Peru, Gladys promoted a committee of 15 women to help them add value to locally produced cocoa, through the production of high quality chocolate and other cocoa products reaching the national market. Likewise in Brazil, in a vulnerable peripheral urban area, where AVSI in partnership with the private sector implemented an educational project, Iracema started Cooperárvore, a cooperative that employs 13 women. Since 2004, the income of these women and their family has substantial increased. Lastly within the current multi-year SCORE project (Sustainable Responses for Improving the Lives of Vulnerable Children and their Households) in Uganda, a household-centered economic strengthening project, the Furaha (happiness in Swahili) graduation and resilience model was introduced and successfully attained by 54% of the 28,386 households, most of them women-led, enrolled in the program.

To conclude, let us recognize the strong evidence that only a people and one's dignity centered approach and effort can provide for sustainable development and poverty eradication.